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Housekeepers' Chat

Friday, August 28, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "August Vegetables." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

Bulletin available: "Aunt Sammy's Radio Recipes Revised."

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"That was a fine meal, Aunt Sammy," said Uncle Ebenezer after dinner last night as he pushed back his chair and began filling his evening pipe. "A mighty fine dinner. Especially the vegetables. Nice red beets, and green greens, and white potatoes. My taste runs to good complexions, you know, in vegetables as well as elsewhere. Some women put a lot of thought and care on the color of their cheeks yet never pay any attention to the color and good looks of the vegetables they serve their families. Lots of beautiful vegetable complexions have been lost in the kettle, especially in the old days before women learned modern ways of cooking. That reminds me of a boarding house I once lived in. A painful memory that is, too. It was back in the old days when I was a very young man and went off to the city to seek my fortune. I lived for a year in that boarding house where every vegetable that appeared on the table had lost its looks, its good flavor, and its personality. I'll never forget the pale, sick-looking beets we had, nor the olive-drab watery masses of spinach, nor the dingy potatoes and cabbage. And in summer, it really broke my heart to see the way the fresh summer vegetables were treated--all of them ruined before they reached the table. Both the vegetables and the boarders lost their complexions in that place."

With all these delicious fresh vegetables in the market and in the garden just now, perhaps we'd better have a little conversation about how to treat them in the kettle so they will keep their good looks, and also their good taste and their good minerals and vitamins.

What's that? You don't mean it. Arabella says that she thinks I'm unnecessarily frivolous to lay so much stress on good looks and complexions. Don't you believe it, Arabella. I was never more serious in my life. Looks in food are most important because of their effect on appetite and the pleasure of meals. Children especially--and you know that they need vegetables even more than grown-ups--well, children especially take to food that appeals to their eyes. If you want a child to like vegetables, see that they look attractive first, and then taste good from the very first taste. You know how first impressions count in forming likes and dislikes. Well, it's a good idea to see to it that every dish of vegetables makes a good impression on the family when it first appears on the table.

Let's consider the matter of complexions in green vegetables first. Green is a color that is frequently lost - or rather changed - to an olive drab or brownish hue during cooking. How can that natural, fresh, attractive

color be preserved when the vegetable is cooked?

The answer, according to the Recipe Lady, is: Cook in an open kettle in slightly salted boiling water until just tender--not a minute longer. Overcooking causes a lot of damage. Long boiling, you see, means loss of color, texture and flavor as well as loss of the valuable nutrients. And another point to remember in preserving that pleasant green is: Lids off the cooking kettles.

Any acid used during cooking turns the green to brown, whereas an alkaline solution helps to hold the color. That's why The Recipe Lady uses salt in the cooking water, but never seasons her greens with lemon juice or vinegar until they are cooked.

That brings us to the question often asked: "Doesn't a pinch of soda in the cooking water help keep the color in green vegetables?"

Yes, it does, But the Recipe Lady doesn't recommend using it.

Why?

Because soda has an injurious effect on the vitamins in vegetables. Since vitamins are one of the big reasons why we want vegetables in our diet, naturally we don't want to destroy them by adding soda. And soda isn't necessary, anyway. If vegetables are cooked quickly, only just long enough to become tender, they will keep their natural fresh, green color.

How much water should be used in cooking vegetables--green and otherwise?

The smallest amount it is possible to cook with. The less water used, the less iron and calcium is dissolved and lost when the water is drained off. But, of course, some water must be used to keep the color in vegetables and to keep them from scorching.

The green leafy vegetables, like spinach and mustard greens may be successfully cooked in just the water that clings to their leaves after washing. When you cook greens in this way, it is necessary to start them with the lid on the kettle, so they won't scorch on the bottom. Keep the lid on until the leaves wilt and steam rises. Then take it off. Some people drop the greens in rapidly boiling salted water, and cook them just a very few minutes. They become tender almost before you know it.

When it comes to peas and beans, have the salted water boiling before you drop them in, but as soon as they are in, cook them just under the boiling point--or simmer. They are more tender cooked at this temperature. But the minute--the very minute--they are done, drain and serve them.

So much for green complexions. Red complexions in beets and red cabbage need just the opposite treatment in one respect. The presence of acid in cooking helps preserve their color and an alkaline solution - salt for example - fades it.

The big point of this whole story is--the point to keep in the back of your mind whenever you start getting the vegetables ready for dinner --is: All vegetables, whether their complexions are green, red, white or yellow--all vegetables look better, taste better and contain more nutrients if they are cooked rapidly until just done and served at once.

If anything makes me sad it is to see some perfectly good string beans, or corn, or potatoes, or nice fresh peas go on the stove in cold water. Dearie me, when I think of all the good substances that are going to soak out into the water as it gradually comes to the boiling point--when I think of the flavor that will be lost and the minerals--Oh, never tell me tragedies that don't go on in the kitchen right under the housewife's nose.

But before I grow too gloomy, let's change the subject and talk about delicious ways of fixing August vegetables. Your green recipe book--the new one-- is full of ideas about corn, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, okra, and so on. Tomatoes can be prepared in so many ways that you can serve them almost every day without monotony. One day you can set some firm, ripe, halves of tomatoes in a buttered baking dish and bake them with a little salt, pepper, sugar and a few buttered bread crumbs over the top. Another night you can serve tomatoes that have been cooked with diced celery or diced cucumbers, seasoned with salt, pepper, butter and perhaps a whole clove or a bay leaf. And before the frost creeps up on the last green tomatoes on the vine, treat your family to some fried green tomatoes.

And this reminds me of the Sunday dinner menu for today, which contains a lot of these seasonal vegetables served in different ways. Yes, the menu contains sliced fried tomatoes, and I'm going to give you the recipe for those. Also it contains--

But let me read it properly:

Broiled steak--It's a Sunday dinner, you know, and once in a while steak seems just the only thing for Sunday, especially if a lot of the men relatives are going to be on hand. Broiled Steak; Potatoes, mashed or just plain boiled; New corn cooked in milk; Fried tomatoes, ripe or green; Cucumber and green pepper salad; and Peach Bavarian cream.

For fried tomatoes there are exactly six ingredients:

6 or 8 firm tomatoes	Finely sifted bread crumbs
1 egg	Salt and pepper, and
1 tablespoon of cold water	1 tablespoon of chopped parsley

There are the six. I'll repeat them (Repeat)

Wash the tomatoes and remove a thin piece from the stem end. Slice about 1/2 inch thick. Beat the egg slightly and add the water. Dip the slices in this, and then roll in bread crumbs which have been seasoned with salt and pepper. Allow the coated slices to dry out somewhat before frying. Heat the fat in a heavy skillet, place the slices in the hot fat, brown on one side, and then turn carefully and reduce the temperature so that they will have sufficient time to cook before browning. Lift them from the skillet to a hot platter, garnish with the chopped parsley and serve at once.

Monday: "Another In-Season Dinner."

